

ERROR ANALYSIS OF TENSE USAGE AMONG UNDERGRADUATE ENGLISH LANGUAGE STUDENTS: A STUDY OF PRESENT SIMPLE AND PAST SIMPLE TENSES IN ABBOTTABAD

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Abstract

This study investigates tense-related errors among undergraduate English language students in Abbottabad, Pakistan, focusing on the present simple and past simple tenses. Using an obligatory-opportunity framework, the research analyzed written production from 90 participants across three colleges. Error analysis revealed five major categories: omission of third-person singular -s (69.2%), use of base form in past contexts (63.3%), overgeneralization of -ed to irregular verbs (55.0%), auxiliary verb misuse (42.2%), and tense shifting confusion (29.2%). The findings indicate that morphological marking and subject-verb agreement pose the greatest challenges for Pakistani EFL learners. These results suggest that systematic attention to inflectional morphology and explicit grammar instruction are essential for improving tense accuracy in undergraduate English language education.

Key Words: EFL learners, English grammar, error analysis, interlanguage, morphological errors, obligatory-opportunity framework, past simple, present simple, second language

acquisition, tense errors.

INTRODUCTION

Language has been the basis of interaction and an instrument for successful communication as well as for the construction of cultural identity, thinking and culture (Crystal, 2010). Tense acquisition is one of the common problems faced by students learning English as a foreign language. Tense marking is a key aspect of effective communication because it allows for the expression of temporal relationships, sequencing of events, and the time frame of actions and states (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 2015). Graddol (2006) pointed out the infiltration of English into different fields like commerce, research and education and technology, and Kachru (1992) has remarked on the importance of English as a language of international communication.

English is the medium of instruction in the higher education sector in Pakistan and plays a vital part in providing access to academic and professional opportunities, and so mastering the forms of the tenses is even more significant in this context. English proficiency is important for academic performance, as Rahman (2002) emphasized, and Mahboob (2017) pointed out that it also ensures social mobility and access to more options. Yet, although English has been taught formally for years, the students' formal training has not led to an improvement in their communicative proficiency or academic achievement, in the sense of making fewer mistakes in tense usage, as evidenced in their oral and written responses (Butt & Rasul, 2012). The role of English in the tertiary education in Pakistan is highlighted by the fact that English is the medium of gaining intellectual excellence and acquiring international opportunities.

The methodological approach in second language acquisition research, error analysis, can give insights into the systematic nature of learner errors, as well as the developmental process of L2 acquisition (Corder, 1967). In contrast with the earlier studies based on negative transfer approach of contrastive analysis, error analysis takes account of the fact that errors are not just the result of interference from the L1 system but are evidence of the L2 learner's active construction process of an interlanguage system. This may be especially useful in the analysis of errors in the tense, which frequently result from complex interactions between linguistic knowledge,

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processing limits, and developmental factors (Ellis, 2008). Grammar plays a key role in second language learning and in grammar, learning the verb tenses is very essential in effective communication.

The present simple and past simple tenses are one of the most common and amongst the earliest tenses acquired in English but they still present problems for learners. The addition of the third person singular morpheme -s/-es to the present simple tense appears to be a simple rule but is not without error, even for learners of all proficiency levels (Swan, 2016). The past simple tense is more complicated than the present tense because it has two forms: regular past tense (-ed) and irregular verbs, resulting in some typical error patterns, such as the overgeneralization of the regular past tense rule (Bardovi-Harlig, 2000). Through the proper use of tenses, students will be able to develop their ability to: associate times, order events, communicate the time of action. It is important to know the type and rate of such errors committed by Pakistani undergraduate learners to design pedagogical interventions to address the errors.

This study aims to identify and analyze the specific errors in the use of present simple and past simple tenses among undergraduate English language students in Abbottabad. By employing a systematic error analysis procedure based on the obligatory-opportunity framework, the research seeks to provide a detailed diagnostic profile of learner difficulties with tense morphology. The findings are expected to contribute to both theoretical understanding of interlanguage development and practical recommendations for grammar instruction in Pakistani EFL contexts.

1.1. Research Objective and Question

The primary objective of this study is to identify and categorize the mistakes in the use of present simple and past simple tenses among undergraduate English language students of selected colleges in Abbottabad.

The research addresses the following question:

- *What are the mistakes in use of present simple and past simple tenses among undergraduate English language students of selected colleges in*

2. Literature Review

2.1. Error Analysis in Second Language Acquisition

The study of error analysis arose as an important methodological approach in the field of L2 acquisition after Corder's (1967) study on the significance of learner errors. Corder contended that mistakes are not only indicators of failure, but also valuable windows into the interlanguage of the learner, their developing linguistic system. From this perspective the focus of attention was changed from errors as stumbling blocks to be eliminated to their natural and informative aspects of the language learning process. Since then, the error analysis tradition has grown more complex, with the identification, description, explanation and evaluation of learner errors being highly developed. (Ellis, 2008) Selinker (1972) expanded the interlanguage notion to the idea that learner language systems, though different from the target language systems, are systematic and rule-governed.

Modern theories of error analysis make a distinction between errors according to their sources, systematicity and developmental significance. Errors, that are not due to interference from the first language, are called intralingual errors, and are relevant with regard to the acquisition of tenses. These are overgeneralization (extending a rule beyond its scope of application), incomplete rule application (the failure to apply the rule completely), and ignorance of the restrictions of the rule (applying the rule when it doesn't apply in some contexts) (Richards, 1974). Such intralingual processes have been consistently found to make up a significant percentage of errors in learner production (Li & Vuono, 2019). The way errors are dealt with by teachers in their L2/FL classroom is a significant issue that has been discussed quite a bit in the L2/FL classroom.

2.2. Tense Acquisition and Common Errors

Some common error categories in the acquisition of the tense of the verbs "to be" and "to have" have been found in research on tense acquisition that emerge from various types of languages. Bardovi-Harlig (2000) pointed out that the development of tense-aspect morphology can be predicted: some forms and functions are mastered earlier than others. The fact that the third

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person singular –s morpheme is a very late-acquired one, as noted in the third person singular (s) morpheme order studies that go back to the 1970s (Dulay & Burt, 1974), is also noteworthy in the present simple tense. The morpheme presents special challenges due to its phonological variability, low communicative load and the possibility of it not having a direct equivalent in learners' first language. The present simple tense is one of the most common tenses in English and is used to talk about: Habitual verbs, Universal facts and continuous condition.

Other types of acquisition, such as past tense, present the other difficulties. Wang and Fang (2023) pointed out that the absence of parallel tense categories in many learners' L1 also helps explain why many learners tend to have trouble with English past tense marking. Typical error types have been described, such as the use of the base form when the past tense form is called for, the overextension of the regular -ed form to irregular verbs, and the inconsistent use of the past tense form in longer discourse (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 2015). Used for actions or events in the past that have finished at a particular time. The irregular verbs appear in unusual forms such as went, saw or took; regular verbs appear in the -ed form. The patterns found indicate that the learner might have declarative knowledge of the rules of the past tense and have difficulty in proceduralizing this knowledge into spontaneous production (DeKeyser, 2007).

There are numerous studies conducted in EFL settings that report high error rates with tense morphology. Güneş (2020) concluded that the Turkish EFL learners continued to make mistakes during the present simple tense formation despite the explicit teaching. Only the indirect CF group kept their accuracy advantage on delayed posttests even though direct and indirect written CF both reduced learners' errors in the present tense. Lillo et al. (2025) reported similar findings for Chilean ESL learners, where errors in the past tense were found to be the most difficult to teach. Past-tense use accuracy was significantly higher for all CF treatments than for the no feedback control group with the metalinguistic feedback group showing

higher accuracy scores on immediate and delayed assessments. Roothoof (2014) has pointed out that EFL learners found the problem with the regular and irregular past tense in oral narrative task. Elicitation prompts and metalinguistic feedback had the same effect on the accuracy of the learners but metalinguistic feedback was more effective, especially for irregular past forms.

Benson and DeKeyser (2019) studied explicit written corrective feedback given with regard to errors associated with the simple past and present perfect tenses. There was a significant difference between both groups receiving direct correction and those receiving metalinguistic feedback and the control group. Results of direct feedback, however, rendered better improvements in the long term in the field of simple past tense. Fu and Li (2022) conclude that corrective feedback in L2 writing is more effective when it is provided immediately than when it is provided at a later stage. It is important to conduct context specific research that takes into account the error patterns of the different groups of learners.

2.3. Tense Errors in the Pakistani Educational Context

There are several languages spoken in Pakistan but the media and education are mostly in English and Urdu language in Pakistan (Shahzadi & Irshad, 2022). Students are required to have high proficiency in English in Pakistan, and it is a requirement in educational institutions. In Pakistan, the education system poses special difficulties in acquiring English. English is the official language, which is also the main medium for higher education but most learners do not have much access to authentic English outside the classroom (Rahman, 2002). It has been pointed out by Mahboob (2017) that in Pakistan, English is being taught by focusing on grammatical rules and examination preparation, which may result in a mismatch between knowledge acquired and actual production.

In order to analyze the errors made by the degree level students in written English, Butt and Rasul (2012) conducted an analysis of common errors in the written English of Pakistani degree level students and they found that the errors related to verb were among the most common types of errors. They concluded that interference of Urdu and other local languages and lack of good practice opportunities were responsible for their persistent

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grammatical problems. Shahzadi & Irshad (2022) discovered the following findings from the perspective of grammatical accuracy: Pakistani university students have systematic problems in grammatical accuracy, especially in morphological marking. Nevertheless, most students of English in colleges are facing the issue of grammatical precision particularly in correct use of tenses because of the impact of their first language and the absence of the opportunity to practice a language in real-life situations. Nevertheless, there are few studies in the field of systematic analysis using the rigorous methodology of error analysis with a particular focus on the acquisition of tense in Pakistani undergraduate contexts. The present study fills this gap by analyzing the patterns of tense errors of undergraduate English language learners in Abbottabad.

2.4. Theoretical Framework

This research is based on three complementary theory perspectives. First, the assumption of the interlanguage hypothesis (Selinker, 1972) that learner errors indicate systematic characteristics of an emerging linguistic system, and not random errors, is taken for granted. This view focuses on the idea that errors are developmental and can provide information concerning the current stage of grammatical competence. Second, Skill Acquisition Theory (DeKeyser, 2007) provides a guideline that can help explain how learners can know the rules of the tenses but not be able to use them correctly in their output. This theory suggests that there is a need for extensive practice and feedback to shift from declarative knowledge to proceduralized and automatic performance. Corrective feedback is an important element of this process as it enables the students to correct themselves and, in the process, they will use it in the future, so that the use becomes automatic.

Third, the Noticing Hypothesis (Schmidt, 1990) states that conscious noticing of language forms is required for acquisition. This view is relevant to the understanding of why some tense features (especially "unmarked" features, like the third-person singular -s) can be persistently problematic. Corrective feedback highlights the errors which may not otherwise be

evident. Learners are unlikely to assimilate these features into their growing interlanguage if they do not notice them in the input. A study meta-analysis by Li (2010) showed that corrective feedback was shown to have a strong impact on the morphological features, such as tense. As such, the theoretical frameworks offer a holistic foundation for analyzing error patterns in learners' production and for making pedagogical suggestions to overcome ongoing problems.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design and Participants

The descriptive approach was used in this study with systematic error analysis technique. This research was carried out in three colleges of Abbottabad: Government Postgraduate College No.1, Army Burn Hall College for Girls, and Government Girls Degree College Malikpura. These institutions were chosen to represent English language learners in various institutional settings in the district. The choice of these colleges was to offer a wide representation of English language learners. The participants of this study were the second year female undergraduate students of English Language programme. This academic level was determined to be appropriate, as the students had enough background experience in the teaching of grammar in English but still made mistakes with tense in their writing.

There were about 340 students in total in the three colleges who were eligible. With a 95% confidence level and a 10% margin of error, the minimum sample size was determined as 77 using Slovin's formula. Given the possibility of some dropouts, 90 students were chosen as the final sample (with 30 students from each college). The students were split into half groups. The students were split into two equal groups. The non-random purposive convenience sampling was used, which is suitable for quasi-experimental study in applied-linguistics context (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The selection of three colleges was based on the accessibility and willingness to participate whereas the classes were grouped based on the institutional schedules. This sampling approach was designed to allow for access to participants who fit the study's criteria, and was done while also recognizing practical considerations of the educational environment (Cohen

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et al., 2018).

3.2. Research Instrument

The test was a written test used as the primary research instrument to elicit the target tense structures. The test comprised two parts: the first part was a 20-item gap fill task while the second part was a 10-item sentence correction task both aimed at the use of the present simple and past simple tenses. The gap-fill items asked the students to fill in the right verb form in context, and the sentence correction items provided them with sentences that needed an error to be identified and corrected. The 2-part design was useful for assessing the performance of the learners and ensured reliability of the analysis of the learners' performance to measure different types of grammatical tasks. The scoring of each response was done based on a rubric where 1 point was given when the response was correct in terms of using the correct tense and 0 points when there was an error made. Two EFL experts reviewed the test items for their content validity, checking the items for linguistic accuracy, clarity and relevance to the research objectives. A small number of students similar to the students in the target population were used in a pilot test to ensure clarity of instructions and proper level of difficulty (Fraenkel *et al.*, 2019). Cronbach's α (Cronbach's internal consistency reliability $> .80$) was used to establish test reliability.

3.3. Error Analysis Procedure

Error analysis procedure was based on the existing error analysis procedure in second language acquisition studies. All 90 test scripts have been retrieved and thoroughly analysed. In both parts of the test, the errors of each student were studied systematically and only errors related to tense morphology and tense-related grammatical structures were analyzed. Any misspellings, errors in punctuation, capitalization, and word choice were intentional in order to focus on the research question. The definition of error used was that an error was defined as any time a learner gave the wrong tense form when the tense was expected in a grammatically necessary context. For instance, present simple sentences with the absence of the third-person singular -s were considered as errors or past time adverbials that

are followed by verbs that are not marked for past tense. This definition was consistent with those of other studies of error analysis and ensured uniformity and objectivity in the detection of errors.

For methodological rigor, a framework of obligatory-opportunities was used in the analysis. In this context, each grammatical context where the learner should use a specific tense was treated as an obligatory opportunity, whether or not the learner used the tense correctly or incorrectly. The theory of obligatory opportunities is based on the error analysis that regards errors as natural and systematic features of a process of interlanguage development. Errors made by L2 learners are important as noted by Corder (1967), because they indicate the underlying linguistic competence of the learner and as a result provide clues about the processes of L2 acquisition. This method enabled calculation of error rates for actual grammatical requirements instead of just error rates for test items. Many test items also included more than one verb or tense-sensitive structure, thus resulting in more opportunities than test items, and giving a better indication of the learner's performance in the language than if these had not appeared in the test.

3.4. Error Classification Categories

Following identification, all errors were systematically classified into five predetermined categories based on the linguistic characteristics of English tense construction. These categories were selected to reflect both morphological and syntactic aspects of tense usage and to represent typical developmental patterns observed in second language learners. The five categories were:

(a) omission of third-person singular -s in present simple contexts, reflecting difficulties with subject-verb agreement and inflectional marking.

(b) use of base form in past contexts, where learners produced present or uninflected verb forms instead of past tense forms, especially in constructions with negativity in the form of auxiliary did.

(c) overgeneralization of -ed to irregular verbs, indicating rule-based generalization and a manifestation of the dependence of rules in generalization by the learners.

(d) auxiliary verb misuse in negative and interrogative constructions,

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involving the use of auxiliary verbs (do, does, did) that are wrong, absent, or misused.

(e) tense shifting or confusion between present and past within sentences. Each error instance was assigned to only one category to prevent overlap and ensure analytical clarity.

3.5. Quantification and Analysis

Following classification, errors were tallied across all obligatory opportunities within each error category. Raw frequencies were converted to percentages using the formula: Error Percentage = (Number of Errors / Total Obligatory Opportunities) × 100. This quantification procedure was applied consistently across all error types to maintain methodological consistency and analytical clarity. Inter-rater reliability was established by having two experienced raters independently score a subset of the data using a standardized rubric, with Cohen's Kappa values exceeding 0.80 indicating high agreement (McHugh, 2012). An item-wise review was also conducted to verify that error patterns were not specific to particular test items or attributable to ambiguity in test design. This review confirmed the occurrence of similar types of errors among several items and among the two types of tasks, which provided evidence that the errors were systematic.

4. Results

4.1. Overview of Error Distribution

The error analysis revealed systematic patterns of difficulty with both present simple and past simple tense forms among the 90 undergraduate participants. Analysis of the written test responses identified a total of 1,145 errors across 2,115 obligatory opportunities, yielding an overall error rate of 54.1%. This high error rate indicates substantial difficulties with tense morphology despite participants' prior exposure to formal English grammar instruction. The distribution of errors across the five predetermined categories revealed clear patterns of differential difficulty, with morphological marking errors predominating over syntactic errors. Present simple occurrences across all scripts generated 585 obligatory opportunities, whereas past simple circumstances using base-form

generated 450 obligatory opportunities. Furthermore, items targeting irregular past tense forms led to 360 obligatory opportunities. Table 1 presents a comprehensive summary of the error analysis results, including error types, descriptions, frequencies, and percentages.

Table 1

Error Types in Present Simple and Past Simple Tenses (N = 90)

Error Type	Tense	Frequency	Percentage
Omission of 3rd person -s	Present Simple	405 / 585	69.2%
Base form in past contexts	Past Simple	285 / 450	63.3%
Overgeneralization of -ed	Past Simple	198 / 360	55.0%
Auxiliary verb misuse	Present Simple	152 / 360	42.2%
Tense shifting/confusion	Both	105 / 360	29.2%

4.2. Present Simple Tense Errors

The most frequent error type was the omission of the third-person singular -s/-es morpheme in present simple contexts, occurring in 405 out of 585 obligatory opportunities (69.2%). This error category represented the highest error rate among all categories analyzed. Typical examples included productions such as "The jury meet every Wednesday" instead of "The jury meets every Wednesday" and "She go to class daily" instead of "She goes to class daily." These errors reflect fundamental difficulties with subject-verb agreement and inflectional marking that persist despite extensive formal instruction in English grammar. The findings indicate that the learners have problems with the option of the lack of -s/es with the third-person singular verbs (he, she, it), which are signs of problems with the subject-verb agreement and inflectional marking.

The high frequency of third-person singular omission errors is consistent with findings from morpheme acquisition studies, which have consistently identified this morpheme as late-acquired and error-prone (Dulay & Burt, 1974). Several factors may contribute to this pattern. First, the -s morpheme carries relatively low communicative load, as meaning can often be inferred from context even when the morpheme is absent. Second, the morpheme has multiple phonological realizations (/s/, /z/, /ɪz/) depending on the final sound of the verb stem, adding to processing complexity. Third, Urdu and other languages spoken by the participants do not have equivalent inflectional

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markers for third-person agreement, potentially limiting positive transfer opportunities. These issues were explained in the case of tense and aspect by Bardovi-Harlig (2000) due to the complexity of these concepts.

The second major present simple error category was auxiliary verb misuse in negative and interrogative constructions, occurring in 152 out of 360 opportunities (42.2%). Errors in this category included omission of the auxiliary verb entirely (e.g., "He not attend the lecture" instead of "He does not attend the lecture") and incorrect selection of the auxiliary form (e.g., "She do not understand" instead of "She does not understand"). These errors indicate difficulties with the syntactic rules governing auxiliary verb insertion and selection in English, which differ substantially from sentence formation patterns in the participants' first languages. The mistakes with the use of negative and interrogative constructions based on the use of auxiliary verbs (do, does, did) that are wrong, absent, or misused represent significant challenges for these learners.

4.3. Past Simple Tense Errors

The most common error with the past tense was the base verb form in the context of past tense marking, which occurred in 285/450 (63.3%) instances. This error pattern appeared in productions like: "He not see the teacher yesterday" (as in he did not see the teacher yesterday); and "The committee decide last year" (as in the committee decided last year). This type of error is common, indicating that learners are not always able to consistently use past tense morphology even when explicit past time adverbials indicate the past. Errors were made where learners used present and/or base verb form instead of past tense form, particularly in constructions involving negativity (auxiliary did).

Overgeneralisation of the regular suffix -ed for irregular verbs was the second largest category of past simple errors (198/360, 55.0%). This was a type of error that led to the formation of errors like "goed" instead of went, "taked" instead of took, and "catched" instead of caught. Inappropriate use of regular past tense rule in the irregular verbs as exemplified by the errors is a reflection of the dependence of the rules in the generalization by the

learners. Overgeneralization errors represent a failure in rule-based processing for items that call upon item-specific lexical knowledge. The typical interlanguage development pattern is that learners first use productive rules to generate forms of the target language and then learn the irregular forms that are exceptions to these rules (Bardovi-Harlig, 2000). The high frequency of overgeneralization in the present study indicates that there were many instances of participants not having mastered irregular past tense forms to produce accurately.

4.4. Tense Shifting and Confusion Errors

Tense shifting or present-past confusion in sentences was the last error category, with 105 of the 360 opportunities giving rise to errors (29.2%). This category had the smallest percentage of error but still accounted for a significant percentage of learner errors. Tense shifting errors included the incorrect switching of tenses within the same sentence or between closely related sentences, e.g., "Yesterday she went to the market, and bought vegetables. These errors indicate some problems in the temporal referencing across discourse that involves the integration of semantic, pragmatic, and morphosyntactic knowledge. The use of inconsistent tenses in sentences will be evident in the learner's work as they strive to master the temporal marking in English.

5. Discussion

Based on the findings of this study, it is found that there are significant and systematic problems in the field of tense morphology in the level of under-graduates students of English language at Abbottabad. The overall error rate for the obligatory opportunities (54.1%) shows that after years of formal English teaching and learning, it was difficult for the participants to produce tense forms correctly in their written texts. This result corroborates the earlier studies which reported chronological grammatical errors in the English language learning performances of Pakistani English language learners (Shahzadi & Irshad, 2022), and offers more specific diagnostic details to the grammatical errors. The results also demonstrate that tense-aspect systems can be rather a challenging issue among the learners, as Bardovi-Harlig (2000) explained these issues due to the complexity of these concepts.

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The high number of morphological errors, especially the missing -s (69.2%) and the base forms in the past (63.3%) indicates that the main difficulty area for these learners is inflectional morphology. This is what would be predicted by theoretical models from Skill Acquisition theory and interlanguage theory. The regularity of these errors suggests that the learner has created a rule-governed, non-target-like representation of the tense morphology of English (Selinker, 1972), which is an interlanguage perspective. A skill acquisition point of view, the high error rates indicate that the learner might have declarative knowledge of the rules of the tenses, but may not have proceduralized the knowledge so that it is automatic and accurate for production. (DeKeyser, 2007) The repeated practice with corrective feedback proved to be very effective in improving the accuracy and fluency of the past tense forms (Suzuki et al., 2019).

These results can be supported by the Noticing Hypothesis (Schmidt, 1990). The -s morpheme in the third person singular is less perceptually salient in spoken input and also committed to the greatest extent. If the input listener is not aware of this feature, then the listener is unlikely to include it in the construction of his/her developing interlanguage. For instance, Ellis et al. (2006) showed that the group which had been clearly corrected on errors in the past tense was more aware and more efficient than those who were not given explicit information on the errors in the past tense. It indicates that explicit reference to morphological forms may be needed to ensure accurate acquisition. The rate of overgeneralization errors is also high (55.0%), suggesting that the learners are actively developing rule-based representations which need to be further developed by providing appropriate feedback and practice with irregular forms.

5.1. Pedagogical Implications

The results have significant implications to the teaching of the English Language in the Pakistani undergraduate settings. There are two main reasons for this. Firstly, there are high error rates in the morphological marking of the verbs, indicating that explicit grammar teaching on inflectional morphology is still required at the undergraduate level. The

teachers should not expect students to have learned the basic tense morphology because they have been taught for years. Second, the specific error patterns found in this study can guide instructional interventions to target the errors. For the 3rd person singular -s form, instruction could focus on making explicit the rules as well as consciousness raising tasks, and extensive practice of subject-verb agreement in meaningful contexts (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 2015). Recently, metalinguistic feedback has been found to be effective in fostering language form awareness and has long-term benefits, especially in the morphosyntactic domain like tense marking (Saito & Lyster, 2012).

Thirdly, there is a significant percentage of overgeneralization errors, which suggests that irregular past tense forms need to be focused upon. The use of overgeneralization is a normal developmental stage but at the undergraduate stage, the learner should be developing the correct production of high frequency irregular verbs. Explicit instruction may be given in irregular verb forms, in contrastive analysis between regular and irregular forms, and in lots of exposure to irregular verb forms in authentic contexts. Fourth, the results validate the use of corrective feedback as pedagogy. Oral corrective feedback, especially explicit correction and metalinguistic feedback, has always been proved to help grammatical accuracy in research (Li, 2010; Lyster & Saito, 2010). The graduated feedback model is a practical model to implement in the classroom. Elicitation techniques can be introduced at the beginning to promote deeper processing and learner autonomy, leading to self-correction. Metalinguistic feedback can offer suggestions on the grammatical structure that has been violated (Panova & Lyster, 2002) if learners cannot self correct.

5.2. Limitations and Future Work

A few caveats need to be noted. First, the study was conducted among female undergraduate students in three colleges of Abbottabad, which might make it difficult to generalize to other population and areas. Second, the study examined only written production, so patterns of errors in oral production might be different. Third, the cross-sectional design only captures problems of a small number of learners at one time, but not what happens to them over time. Fourth, the research was limited to certain

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grammatical structures and thus the findings might not be applicable to all the language learning areas. The study's limitations could be overcome in future research by the use of larger and more representative samples, by adding oral production data, and by using longitudinal designs for tracking learner development over time. Further, experimental research into the effectiveness of specific instructional interventions for the different types of errors found in this study would offer important pedagogical guidance.

Conclusion

This study investigated tense-related errors among undergraduate English language students in Abbottabad, focusing on the present simple and past simple tenses. The error analysis, employing an obligatory-opportunity framework, revealed systematic patterns of difficulty with tense morphology. The most frequent errors were omission of the third-person singular -s (69.2%), use of base forms in past contexts (63.3%), and overgeneralization of -ed to irregular verbs (55.0%). These findings indicate that morphological marking, particularly inflectional suffixation, represents the primary challenge for these learners. The results support the need for continued explicit grammar instruction at the undergraduate level, targeted interventions addressing specific error types, and systematic use of corrective feedback to promote accurate tense production. By providing detailed diagnostic information about learner difficulties, this study contributes to both theoretical understanding of interlanguage development and practical recommendations for improving English language instruction in Pakistani educational contexts.



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